



HIGHLIGHTS

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE

United States Department of Agriculture • Washington, DC 20250

Ag Statistics Hotline: 1-800-727-9540 • www.usda.gov/nass/

Contact: Marc Tosiano (717) 787-3904
nass-pa@nass.usda.gov

CENSUS REVEALS TWO-THIRDS OF BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN PRINCIPAL OPERATORS OWN THEIR FARM

HARRISBURG, PA (2/23/05) – According to the 2002 Census of Agriculture, land ownership is high among Black or African American principal operators nationwide. Two-thirds of all Black or African American principal operators in the U.S. are full owners of the farms they operate. Ninety-one percent of Black or African American principal operators own at least a portion of the land they operate. Black or African American operators represent 1.4 percent of all principal farm operators in the U.S. but only 0.1 percent of all principal farm operators in Pennsylvania with 62 operations.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) released the 2002 Census of Agriculture results in June. Conducted every five years, the census of agriculture is the only source of consistent, comparable and detailed data for every county in America. To better serve and meet the needs of ALL farmers in Pennsylvania, including Black and African American operators, various organizations use statistics from the Census of Agriculture to support programs benefiting small farms. These include: Penn State Extension, Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE), the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, ag lenders & suppliers and farm organizations and advocacy groups that speak on behalf of their membership.

“The 2002 Census of Agriculture is an excellent resource for understanding the facts on minority farmers and ranchers in the U.S.,” said Ron Bosecker, NASS Administrator. “New methodology used for the 2002 Census of Agriculture has greatly improved representation of

small and minority operated farms and ranches compared to prior censuses. This improved methodology allows for a truly representative picture of the agriculture and farming population in each State and county."

In 2002, the number of Black or African American principal operators counted nationwide increased to 29,090, up 8.6 percent from 26,785 in 1997. Of those Black or African American principal operators, 62 were in Pennsylvania. The average age of Black or African American principal operators in Pennsylvania was 53.3 years, about the same as the Pennsylvania average of 53.1 years for all principal operators. Among Black or African American principal operators, 50 percent listed farming as their primary occupation in Pennsylvania compared to 56 percent nationwide. Farms in Pennsylvania with Black or African American principal operators averaged 69 acres, 40 percent smaller than the national average of 115 acres.

In addition to the principal operator, information was gathered on up to two additional operators for the first time in the 2002 Census of Agriculture. When three operators per farm could be reported, a total of 30,605 farms in the U.S. had Black or African American operators in 2002. Of that total, 93 farms were in Pennsylvania. Nationwide, the farm land operated by Black or African American operators totaled over 3.8 million acres. Of this acreage, 7,552 acres were reported in Pennsylvania; this is one percent of all land in Pennsylvania farms. Washington County had the most reported acreage operated by Black or African American operators with 2,079 acres across 10 farms.

"I want to thank growers for taking their time to help with the Ag Census and other surveys that generate these official agricultural statistics," said Marc Tosiano, Director of the USDA/NASS-PA Statistical Office. "We in agriculture are continually subject to regulation and

legislation, so we need the facts instead of guesses and gut feelings to define and sometimes defend our industry.”

Census results are available for free on the NASS Web site at www.usda.gov/nass/ or may be purchased by calling 1-800-727-9540. NASS collects and provides a vast array of production, economic, demographic and environmental facts about U. S. agriculture through regularly scheduled weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual reports.

Find agricultural statistics for your county, State, and the Nation at www.usda.gov/nass/.